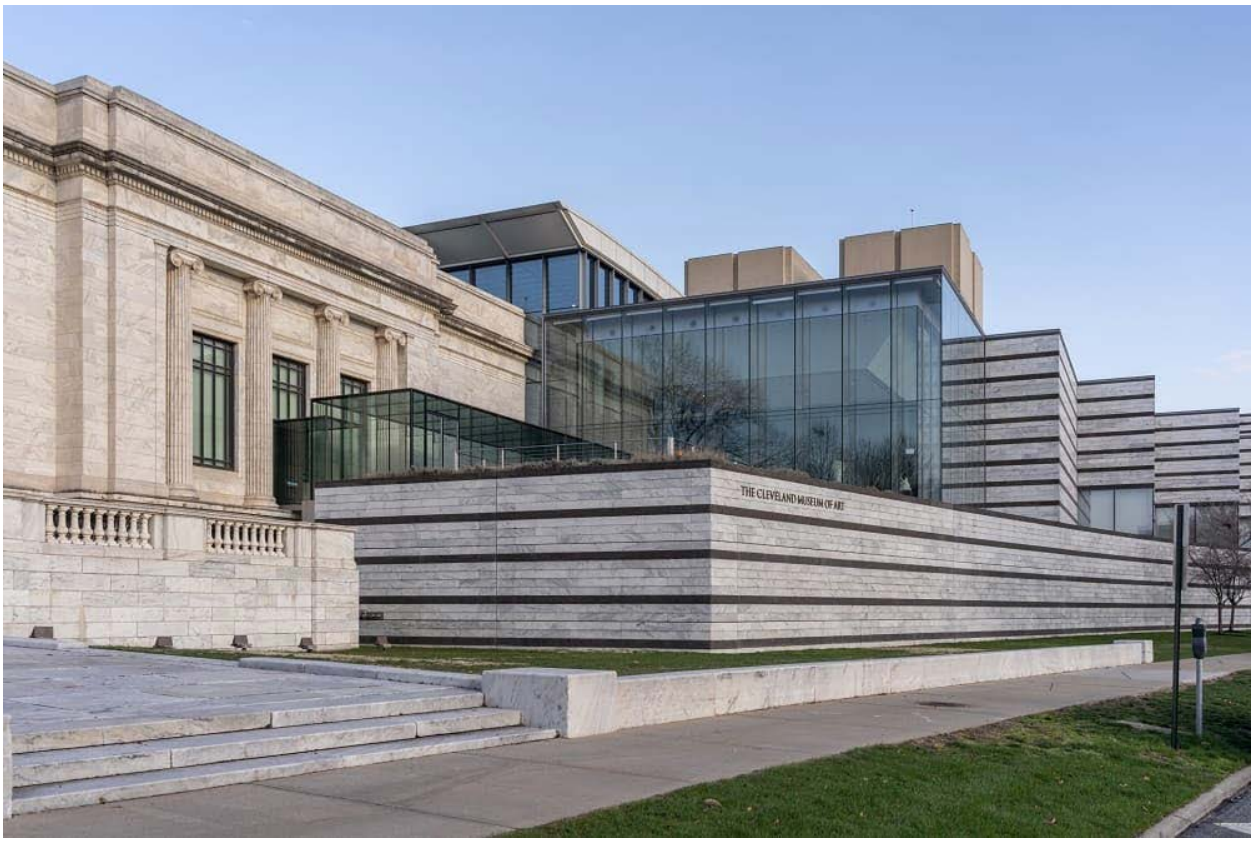
The Cleveland Museum of Art Presents a Seminal Survey of Chinese Art Including more than 200 Objects from over 40 International Collections

Tuesday August 29, 2023



Contact the Museum's Media Relations Team:
(216) 707-2261
marketingandcommunications@clevelandart.org

China’s Southern Paradise: Treasures from the Lower Yangzi Delta is the first exhibition in the West to focus on the art and cultural impact of the area south of the Yangzi River

PRESS KIT

CLEVELAND (August 29, 2023) — The Cleveland Museum of Art is pleased to announce the opening of China's Southern Paradise: Treasures from the Lower Yangzi Delta, a landmark exhibition that explores the historical and cultural riches of a pivotal region known as Jiangnan. The exhibition—the first in the West to focus on this area—features more than 200 objects relating to Jiangnan which has remained one of China's wealthiest, most populous, and agriculturally fertile lands.

China's Southern Paradise, shown exclusively at the Cleveland Museum of Art, opens September 10, 2023, and is on view through January 7, 2024, in the Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation Exhibition Hall.

Through major loans from more than 40 institutions around the world and selections from the Cleveland Museum of Art's world-renowned collection of Chinese art, China's Southern Paradise explores the coastal region south of the Yangzi River, where the earliest remains of cultivated rice were found. Key loans from seven Chinese institutions, including the Beijing Palace Museum, the Shanghai Museum, and the Nanjing Museum, bring rarely seen objects to the US that illustrate how Jiangnan gained a leading role in China's artistic

production and succeeded in setting cultural standards. The exhibition also includes objects from Japan, Europe, Canada, and throughout the United States, brought together for the first time, some of which have never been presented to the public before.

Jiangnan's lush, green scenery inspired poets and artists to conceive it as heaven on earth. For millennia, it has been an area of rich agriculture, extensive trade, and influential artistic production. Art from Jiangnan—home to such great cities as Hangzhou, Suzhou, and Nanjing, as well as to hilly picturesque landscapes stretched along rivers and lakes—has defined the image of traditional China for the world.

"So much of what we associate with traditional China today—such as rice, silk and lacquer production, color printing, garden culture, landscape painting—either originated or flourished in the Jiangnan region," said Clarissa von Spee, the show's curator and the James and Donna Reid Curator of Chinese Art, Interim Curator of Islamic Art and Chair of Asian Art at the Cleveland Museum of Art. "To bring these rare, unique treasures together from around the world provides a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for visitors, nationally and abroad, to witness the richness and unsurpassed quality of art from a part of China that is still associated with natural beauty, elegance, high culture, and erudition. Jiangnan imagery and goods that reached 18th-century Europe shaped our idea of China more than any other region."

Exhibits in China's Southern Paradise range in material from jade, silk, prints, and paintings to porcelain, lacquer, and bamboo carvings, and date from the Neolithic ageto the 18th century.

Exhibition highlights include:

- A 12th-century National Treasure from the Tokyo National Museum—categorized as among the most precious of Japan's Tangible Cultural Properties—Imaginary Journey through Xiao-Xiang is a handscroll that reflects the region's natural beauty of mist-shrouded mountains along rivers and lakes.
- An 82-foot-longscroll documents in fascinating detail urban and rural life along the route of the Kangxi emperor's 1689 Southern Inspection Tour from Beijing via the Grand Canal to the lower Yangzi delta (Jiangnan), lent from the University of Alberta Art Museums.
- The Cleveland Museum of Art's well known carved jade cup with Daoist procession, almost identical in shape and decoration with an imperially markedwhite cup in the Beijing Palace Museum, will be shown together for the first time. Believed to have been made by Suzhou craftsmen, they exhibit a high point of refinement and workmanship, and offer a unique opportunity for comparison.

- On view for the first time in the United States, grains of carbonized rice excavated from Tianluoshan, asite of the Neolithic Hemudu culture in modern Zhejiang province, represent the world's earliest cultivated rice, lent from the Zhejiang Archaeological Institute.
- Also on view for the first time to the American public is a group of large-scale, multicolor prints, the finest of their type ever produced in China. These printsfrom Suzhou depict fashionable beauties and famous sights.
- New Year's Morning is a European-style tapestry depicting a large family gathering that once furnished an imperial palace interior. Thanks to the generous support of June and Simon K.C. Li, this rare tapestry in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art was conserved for the exhibition by the Textile Conservation Laboratory at St. John the Divine Cathedral in New York. Only one other example is known to be in the Beijing Palace Museum.
- The Cleveland Museum of Art's five-stringed guqin,a zither that is China's most prestigious musical instrument, was the subject of a discovery when conservators cleaned the object for display and found an inscription which established that the instrument was made by Zhang Ruixiu from Suzhou in 1584.

"This is an exhibition that the Cleveland Museum of Art is uniquely qualified to organize," said William M. Griswold, Director and President of the Cleveland Museum of Art. "Our incredible holdings of Chinese art have inspired the confidence of our more than 40 partners across the world to lend works of art, which allow us to present an exhibition with objects of impressive quality and scope never seen together before."

Principal support is provided by June and Simon K. C. Li and the MCH Foundation. Major support is provided by the American Friends of the Shanghai Museum and the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation. Generous support is provided by an anonymous supporter and the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional support is provided by the Blakemore Foundation, William and Terry Carey, the Gramercy Park Foundation, Carl M. Jenks, the Metropolitan Center for Far Eastern Art Studies, Xiling Group, and Zheng He Management Group.

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Lloyd H. Ellis Jr., Leigh and Andy Fabens, the Frankino-Dodero Family Fund for Exhibitions Endowment, Janice Hammond and Edward Hemmelgarn, Carl T. Jagatich, Cathy Lincoln, Eva and Rudolf Linnebach, William S. and Margaret F. Lipscomb, Bill and Joyce Litzler, Carl and Lu Anne Morrison, Jeffrey Mostade and Eric Nilson and Varun Shetty, Tim O'Brien and Breck Platner, William J. and Katherine T. O'Neill, Michael and Cindy Resch, Betty T. and David M. Schneider, the Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation, Margaret and Loyal Wilson, the Womens Council of the Cleveland Museum of Art, and Claudia Woods and David Osage.

The exhibition catalogue for China's Southern Paradise: Treasures from the Lower Yangzi Delta was produced with the generous support of the MCH Foundation.

Generous support of the exhibition symposium is provided by the Kingfisher Foundation.

Complementary Programming

SYMPOSIUM

"Jiangnan–Objects in Focus"
In conjunction with the exhibition China's Southern Paradise: Treasures from the Lower Yangzi Delta
Saturday, November 4, 2023, 10:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m.
Gartner Auditorium

Free; ticket required

"Jiangnan–Objects in Focus" is an international one-day symposium featuring15 scholars from the United States, Asia, and Europe, who will each give a talk spotlighting one exhibit in their respective area of expertise. The goal of the symposium is to discuss highlights of the exhibition and foster a better understanding of the Jiangnan region and its artistic and cultural role in China and beyond.

Generous support of the exhibition symposium is provided by the Kingfisher Foundation.

LECTURE
THE PAULINE AND JOSEPH DEGENFELDER DISTINGUISHED LECTURE IN CHINESE ART
"Heaven Is High and the Emperor Is Far Away": Jiangnan in Ming Dynasty China
Speaker: Craig Clunas, Professor Emeritus of the History of Art, University of Oxford
Sunday, November 5, 2023, 2:00 p.m.
Gartner Auditorium

Free; ticket required

Although the Jiangnan region of China, meaning “south of the Yangtze,” was the site of the first Ming dynasty capital, the court relocated to the north of China half a century after the dynasty’s founding. From this time, emperors and their immediate families were largely absent from the culture of this prosperous and vibrant heartland. But many ties still linked the culture of Jiangnan’s “Southern Paradise” and that of the Ming court. This lecture focuses on what artworks, as well as literature, can tell us about the often-fraught relationship between Jiangnan, its people, and their distant rulers in the north.

Craig Clunas is the first scholar of Asian art to hold the chair of art history at the University of Oxford. Educated in Cambridge, Beijing, and London, he began his career as a curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. He is the author of numerous works on Chinese art and culture, particularly of the Ming period. He is a fellow of the British Academy and, in 2012, delivered the Mellon Lectures at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

All education programs at the Cleveland Museum of Art are underwritten by the CMA Fund for Education. Generous annual support is provided by an anonymous supporter, Brenda and Marshall Brown, Florence Kahane Goodman, Eva and Rudolf Linnebach, Bill and Joyce Litzler, Mandi Rickelman, Betty T. and David M. Schneider, the Sally and Larry Sears Fund for Education Endowment, the Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation, Roy Smith, and the Womens Council of the Cleveland Museum of Art. Additional annual support is provided by the M. E. and F. J. Callahan Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. Walter R. Chapman Jr., Char and Chuck Fowler, the Giant Eagle Foundation, the Lloyd D. Hunter Memorial Fund, the Logsdon Family Fund for Education, and the Trilling Family Foundation.